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ABSTRACT

This booklet asserts that teacher retraining is directly linked to improving the teaching of reading and to basic education in general. It states that a successful in-service training program should have focus and vitality and should integrate a variety of training devices to meet the individual needs of the teachers. An effective program must assess the needs in education and must develop a systematic theory on which to build teaching procedures. Six needs in education today are identified in this booklet as a starting point for program development: (1) the need to develop throughout the curriculum, a high degree of social awareness; (2) the need to develop in youth the skills associated with problem analysis and problem solving; (3) the need to deepen students' understanding of participatory democracy, commitment to its ideals, and a sense of moral and civic responsiblity; (4) the need to strengthen students' values and priorities with respect to personal and public good; (5) the need to instill optimism regarding the human capacity to improve the quality of life; and (6) the need to nurture a clear perception of how one's personal future can be shaped. (MAI)

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The Right to Read Program, Basic Education, and Teacher Professional Growth

Right to Read

State Board of Education
Illinois Office of Education
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THE RIGHT TO READ PROGRAM, BASIC EDUCATION, AND TEACHER PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

The following remarks sketch out interrelationships among recent trends in curriculum development, teacher in-service education, Right to Read programs, and the frequently discussed basic education movement. These phenomena may appear unrelated, each representing a particular set of parameters. Yet the task of educational leadership is to discover a common bond between these seemingly disparate programs.

At the outset, it may be useful to consider the image of education commonly held by the public. There are those who suggest that our schools are on the edge of disaster because of criticism that has repeatedly appeared in the media. It is precisely this criticism that is largely responsible for the "back to basics" movement. Things, however, may not be as bad as we have been led to believe.

It has become commonplace to speak of the crisis in education. However, when the alleged crisis is subjected to thoughtful analysis, it turns out that the dangers are perhaps less critical than we had imagined. Problems do exist. School enrollments have fallen sharply and may continue to fall before they eventually level off. The school's image has become tarnished by media emphasis on declining test scores; and the public's faith in its educational institutions has correspondingly dwindled.

The cost of schooling--subject to inflation--has risen sharply and school budgets have been stretched to the point where a program of dollar austerity is likely to be a hallmark of the future. Drug addiction remains a serious problem in most secondary schools. Crime and violence, particularly in the inner city schools, have dramatically increased. Finally, an over-supply of trained teachers, coupled with reduced enrollments, has created an extraordinary unemployment dilemma. Whether this collection of untoward events constitutes a crisis unique to education is open to serious question.

For it is not the schools alone, but all of our social institutions that are undergoing radical change in response to the times. Many of the alleged failures of education are attributable, not to educational management, but rather to flaws elsewhere in the social fabric. Inflation stems from stresses in the economic sector. Drug abuse and violence reflect an era characterized by increasing human expectations, diminishing tolerance for adversity, and a long-overdue effort to correct social imbalances and injustice. Declining scores on standardized achievement tests are partly a consequence of instructional emphasis on learning objectives that can not be measured by traditional tests--the extraordinary amounts of time children devote to television-viewing, and less parental involvement in learning at home. Finally, the over-abundance of teachers has resulted, in part, from short-sightedness of teacher-training institutions and, in part, from an abrupt shift in the birth-rate.

It suffices to say that while the schools are far from perfect, they are handicapped by the same stresses which afflict other social institutions, and many of their problems are consequently inevitable. Administrators must, nonetheless,

deal with the trials and tribulations, and the traditional approaches to problem-solving may no longer be workable.

During the past half-century there has been little development in new approaches to school leadership. Schools are administered today much as they were three decades ago. The need for renewal is critical. Too often, leadership has reduced itself to management by edict. Where teaching is concerned, however, edits are futile because escape routes are always present.

For this reason, the calculus of efficiency that recently has dominated our thinking is largely hopeless. Raymond Callahan warned of the excesses which result from the imposition of factory control mechanisms in schools. He called for leadership which could temper efficiency with vision:

> Our leaders in education will have to have the kind of education in the humanities and the social and natural sciences to enable them to understand the great problems of our age, so that they can make judgments about the kind and quality of education which our children will need. Then they will have to have not only the professional competence necessary to implement this education but also the knowledge and skill to determine whether the desired outcomes are being achieved.

What we must hope for, in the period ahead, is an approach to leadership where school administration is both humane and efficacious, imaginative as well as prudent.

It would be senseless to deny the realities of a troubled economy, to assume that public education can rely upon unlimited supplies of money. Available dollars will need to be stretched. But a careful reordering of priorities must occur, and we may well discover that money rationally expended in the cause of significant quests is a good bargain.

Among other reasons for seeking a more contemporary model of school administration is the need to manage a period of decline with sound judgment and skill. A different administrative art is required during times of expansion and times of contraction. Since the enterprise must now be made smaller, since something must go and something must stay, we require leaders who can guide us toward responsible choices.

We are faced with a large order: we must clarify aspects of leadership which can expedite the improvement of schools; seek tangible ways to apply what is known about leadership to the administration of schools; make and test modifications in the present system of administration; redefine the critical skills which school leaders need to command and change the training of principals and superintendents accordingly. Finally, we must develop new criteria for the selection of educational leaders.

The need to reorganize the curriculum, both from the standpoint of procedural routine and traditional policy-making apparatus, has been much discussed in recent times. Forces generating the current search for curricular reform are: attempts at greater community involvement; student expectations with respect to relevance; implications of ethnicity; militant demands of teachers for involvement in educa-

tional policy-making; mounting arguments for and against increased teacher specialization; economic limitations; and the belief that school can be a place where children and teachers learn together. As the reform process is played out, the administrator is truly the man in the middle.

It is against this backdrop that issues surrounding basic education must be considered. A renewed emphasis on basics is, in part, a reaction to the much-publicized decline in standardized achievement scores. But the trend also reflects a growing conservatism. Confronted with an endless array of disquieting problems, inflation and unemployment on the one hand, crime and violence on the other, people cling to the assumption that the reinstitution of instructional practices from the past will bring back the good old days. Monetary and psychic depressions take their toll in the form of irrationality; and it is not uncommon to discover that some people, incredibly, see a direct connection between modern math and drug abuse.

These circumstances notwithstanding, efforts to reform the curriculum must continue, the teaching of reading must be improved; and administrators will therefore be called upon to engineer desirable changes. At the present moment, for example, considerable interest has arisen in the continuing professional education of teachers. Having examined the success and failures of educational innovation during the 1960's, we now recognize there is a direct linkage between in-service education and instructional improvement. Teacher retraining has direct implications for the Right to Read program, in specific, and to basic education in general.

Teacher in-service education in the time ahead must clue-in on the following: (1) the need to develop, throughout the curriculum, a high degree of social awareness; (2) the need to develop among youth the skills associated with problem-analysis and problem-solving; (3) the need to deepen students' understanding of participatory democracy, commitment to its ideals, and a sense of moral and civic responsibility; (4) the need to strengthen students' values and priorities, with respect to personal and public good; (5) the need to instill greater optimism regarding the human capacity to overcome social difficulties and heighten the quality of life; and (6) the need to nurture in each student a clear perception of how one's personal future can be shaped.

A skillful and imaginative teacher can do a great deal toward expanding social awareness. Popular songs, newspaper articles, contemporary social-commentary TV programs, and similar media material can be used in literature, social studies, science, mathematics and even career education classes to bring home to the student an awareness of family disintegration, drug abuse and other social problems.

Virtually everything we with to teach can be taught in a problem-solving context. During recent decades much of the curriculum has become inquiry-oriented. Children have grown accustomed to searching out cause and effect, testing hypotheses, predicting the consequences of particular actions, comparing alternatives, and so on. A good foundation already exists for developing more comprehensive problem-solving techniques. The importance of encouraging children to think about prospective solutions to social and personal problems is not the quest for right answers, but rather the inculcation of a constructive mental-set toward problem-solving.

For much the same reasons, life in the classroom must provide a better example of democracy in action. Whenever the subject-matter or school activity permits, learning should sharpen insights regarding negotiation and compromise, as well as

provide direct experience in conflict resolution. Through such activities students can learn a tolerance for divergent points of view, a respect for the mechanisms of the democratic process, and a familiarity with what recently has come to be called "people power."

The matter of values and priorities, too, transcends particular areas of the curriculum. Issues regarding priorities have become crucial. Whereas in the past the human problem was to choose between right and wrong, in the future we may need to make infinitely more difficult choices between two conflicting "rights." Hence, the curriculum must provide routine exercise in choice-making, a special form of problem-solving. Moreover, since the need to choose is, in itself, often anxiety-provoking, there are emotional as well as intellectual dimensions involved. Instructional activity must help students formulate healthy values, translate these values into moral judgments regarding personal and public priorities, and minimize emotional tensions.

The restoration of optimism and re-invigoration of social spirit are particularly relevent in the final years of high school. The fashioning of students' personal future images can be worked on starting in the middle years. Both objectives are related to humanistic aspects of instruction and can be fused with substantive instructional content across the curriculum.

If teaching becomes increasingly specialized, the organization of in-service education for the future will take one direction. But if the move toward specialization is resisted, it will be necessary to deal simultaneously with a multiplicity of requirements.

Given this collection of short-range teaching requirements for the period immediately ahead, the key question then becomes: Can the present system of procedures accommodate the needs?

Teacher in-service education, historically, has never amounted to much. Davies synthesized the situation in one terse sentence: "In-service training is the slum of American education--disadvantaged, poverty-stricken, neglected, psychologically isolated, riddled with exploitation, broken promises, and conflict." Again and again, a useful innovation has been lost at the classroom door simply because we have failed to prepare the teacher.

The typical program in teacher in-service education lacks vitality and focus. Knowledge of human behavior modification is largely ignored. Teacher incentive is scant. The outcomes of retraining are generally poor.

Successful teaching is dependent upon a number of distinct skills, and teachers differ markedly in the extent to which they have mastered these skills. Retraining needs to be individualized accordingly. Yet, we lack ways to individualize retraining with reasonable economic efficiency.

All parents do not have the same expectations of their schools; all children do not learn in the same way; all learners do not have the same abiding concerns. Thus, the teaching of eighth-grade history must vary according to the situation; it often needs to be handled differently in two classrooms of the same school. We must have methodologies through which we can assist the teacher to accomplish a specific task, in a specific situation, with a specific kind of learner. We must devise programs which make it possible for the teacher to function in the environment and subsculture of the particular school.

Present in-service training programs usually take one of four forms: (1) expository exhortation, either spoken or written, through which teachers are implored to utilize a particular method, emphasize a particular set of ideas, or accept a particular set of assumptions; (2) demonstration teaching in which an expert demonstrates a teaching method with students; (3) supervised trials in which teachers attempt to use a specified teaching method or teach a prescribed lesson, and are then subjected to critical appraisal; (4) performance analysis in which the classroom actions of teacher and student are recorded and reported to the teacher so that an analysis of error can be made. Since teachers are individuals, they respond differently to training stimuli; and since the appropriateness of a training method varies with the task at hand, teacher retraining must be multilateral rather than unilateral. We need systems which permit us to integrate a variety of training devices within the same program.

We have tacitly assumed that a supervisor, principal, or college professor, in the power of office, is able to train teachers. This is an unreasonable assumption. If we are to exploit staff development programs to promote educational change, three things are indispensable: we must develop an effective training methodology; we must train "trainers" to use this methodology; and we must help those who judge teachers and measure their worth to understand and value training goals.

Our attempts to improve teacher in-service education are hampered by a lack of systematic theory. In the absence of such theory, it is difficult to build efficacious procedures. To accomplish effective teacher growth, we shall need to help teachers develop techniques and gain insights which ultimately make them self-sufficient in creating their own instructional programs. The teacher must know both what to do and why to do it.

Our knowledge regarding the real effects of schooling is uncertain. We know too little about cause and effect, about the advantages and disadvantages associated with particular instructional procedures; and we are unclear about intelligent ways to remedy our ignorance. For example, have declining scores on standardized tests been caused by poor teaching methods, faulty learning materials, or excessive preoccupation with television? How important are standardized test scores in relation to a functional and productive adulthood? Perhaps the realization that we know less than we though we did makes the current stock-taking particularly welcome.

Historically, periods of frenetic activity have been followed by times of relative tranquility, when efforts have been made to separate fact from fiction. There is good reason to believe that the reexaminations and reevaluations under way will be beneficial: first, in facilitating the invention of more efficient analytic tactics; and second, in utilizing the tactics to acquire a better understanding of curricular outcomes.

Whatever the result of the reappraisals, it seems clear that subsequent modifications in instruction will take place in a changed society. Whereas the innovations of the 1960's occurred in a climate of optimism and openness, characterized by an expanding system, ready money, and high expectations, a strikingly different social and political environment now exists. The money supply has diminished, confidence has ebbed, optimism has given way to growing pessimism, and many new problems have appeared. The present government administration, for example, has taken a progressively harder stance on school aid. On both state and

local fronts, rising costs and falling budgets generate economic hardship. Had Congress not overridden several Presidential vetoes, the economic plight of the schools would be even more serious. Moreover, there is little hope that the situation will improve in the near future. So long as the nation's general economic health is impaired and the citizenry assumes that high-quality education is a luxury, the outlook will be bleak.

Indicators suggest that crime and violence in the schools will continue to drain energy from the teaching-learning process. Particularly in urban settings, teachers and administrators have been forced to become concerned with survival of person and property. A Senate sub-committee on juvenile delinquency has placed the annual cost of vandalism in school facilities at $500,000,000. The committee's records show over 100 murders, roughly 70,000 attacks on teachers, and several hundred thousand assaults on students in a single calendar year. The situation has become so serious that Congressional legislation on school security is imminent. While crime and violence have little to do with curriculum theory, there is considerable evidence that theoretically desirable teaching arrangements are frequently rejected because they threaten orderliness. Conservatism, rigidity and control may supersede learning as educational imperatives. Particularly in the larger cities, teacher strikes, disputes over bussing and integration, student riots, and an increasing rate of absenteeism continue to interrupt systematic instruction and learning.

Increasingly sensitive to student rights, the courts have taken actions which complicate school management. The Supreme Court has now ruled that penalties against students cannot be imposed without full due-process procedures. While the protection of a student's personal liberties is crucial, the need to comply with legal restrictions will undoubtedly enlarge the bureaucratic aspects of administration and drain additional time and energy from the fundamental purpose of schooling--the provision of good education.

Reappraisals of the past decade will help determine which changes were authentic; which, despite problems and imperfections, offered benefits; and which were empty shibboleths.

However, our evaluative techniques are imprecise. Critics have heaped abuse on scholars, and viewed the scientific enterprise with skepticism. Such criticism, however, overlooks the enormous impedimenta involved in the research process. Given the complexity of the educational system, expectations of sure-fire solutions are hopelessly false. Because of the extraordinary number of variables at play, even the most solid research contributes piecemeal, rather than comprehensive, evidence. Ideologies differ, convictions regarding educational purpose conflict; operational exigencies vary from situation to situation, and the educational record is replete with instances in which good ideas have been badly deployed.

Furthermore, implementation of an innovation often illuminates problems not apparent experimentally. Prolonged use of a new procedure tends to produce unsuspected side-effects. The merit of a new movement can be ascertained only after sustained replication, under diverse circumstances, by a broad cross section of practitioners.

Just as an auto mechanic must systematically and painstakingly rule out one potential trouble source after another, implications derived from research must be fabricated into a workable program, tried and re-tried, evaluated and re-evaluated, until valid judgments can be made. The current scene is marked most

conspicuously by efforts to clarify the confusion which has developed. It has become clear that three distinct sources of error exist: First, the reasoning through which curriculum policy decisions are made may be artless, and the resulting policies may therefore be ineffectual. Second, the methods and organizational schemes through which policies are implemented may be poorly conceived (or the implementation strategy may distort the basic intent of the policies). And third, the evaluation mechanisms may be inappropriate, badly executed, or misinterpreted.

Much of our difficulty in planning effective programs for teacher in-service education stems from the vagueness of educational policy. Since policies are based, in part, upon fact, and in part, on predispositions, they are subject to error. Most importantly, it is exceedingly difficult to judge the effects of schooling. When we say that a particular school is good or bad, we may have in mind (1) the amount of knowledge students acquire; (2) the extent to which students like the school; (3) the degree to which the school pleases the parents; (4) the attractiveness of the physical facility; and so on. Schools can be judged by different criteria, each of which yields different clues for change.

It is largely for these reasons that it is hazardous to argue particular policies for the teaching of reading and Right to Read endeavors. Massive amounts of money have been invested in research on reading. Practitioners have evolved a variety of successful tactics. Even if there were one best way to teach reading, it is highly doubtful whether all teachers could use the method with equal success. Our understanding of the intricacies of reading instruction fall short of the ideal; and there is much to be learned. It is largely for this reason that a large-scale research program on the teaching of reading has been established at the University of Illinois.

The teaching of reading can be reduced to ten operational concepts:

1. Parental involvement is a significant factor in improving reading skills in the primary grades.

2. Premature emphasis on reading skills (during the pre-school years) appears to offer little real advantages.

3. Prevailing theories on the teaching of reading conflicts: It cannot be assumed, therefore, that one method is superior.

4. No known teaching method produces superior results with every child.

5. Used properly by skilled teachers, basal readers seem to yield consistently satisfactory results.

6. Teachers, not methods, seem to produce the main difference in reading achievement.

7. Although failure to teach comprehensive skills has contributed to falling scores on standardized reading tests, factors outside the school have also been heavily contributory.

8. Scores on primary-grade reading tests, emphasizing word recognition, have risen. Scores on middle-grade tests, emphasizing comprehension,

have fallen. The conclusion is that word recognition skill does not guarantee parallel comprehension skill.

9. It is important to maintain a proper balance between the teaching of comprehension and the teaching of decoding skills.

10. The use of behavioral objectives in reading comprehension can be problematic; the assessment of learner outcomes, on the basis of such objectives, should be cautiously approached.

The quality of reading instruction will improve only as we learn more about techniques for individualizing learning. Not only do all of the available methods produce some successes and some failures, but children vary considerably in their kinesthetic, auditory, and visual development during the early stages of reading instruction. Since the desire to learn is even more crucial in reading than in other aspects of the curriculum, efforts to solve the problem of limited motivation must continue.

Our greatest weakness lies in the fact that we still fail to teach a large percentage of our youths to read effectively. The bulk of these students stem from poverty-stricken families and ethnic minorities. Since no learning is more fundamental than basic literacy, everything possible must be done to correct the deficiency.

Research shows that some children learn to read more quickly than others, and instructional time must be allotted accordingly. Evidence also indicates futile efforts to prove one method of teaching reading superior to others. What works for one child or teacher is ineffectual for another. It would make more sense to focus our energies on finding which particular method works best for each given child and teacher.

Any survey of test results can be controversial. Experts disagree as to validity and reliability of the test, accuracy of interpretations, and causal factors determining the results.

Be this as it may, reading research deserves serious attention. Further developmental work is needed to improve the teaching of comprehension. Perhaps the greatest error in reading instruction is excessive and unwarranted stress upon one element at the expense of another. The teaching of skills must be balanced with attention to the pleasurable aspects of reading and clarification of what children infer and interpret from their reading.

Continued research on methods of teaching reading is desirable. In particular, more must be learned about the perceptual processes through which children derive meaning from context. Yet, it should be remembered that the efficiency, effectiveness and commitment of the teacher are of far greater importance than the method used.

There has been a substantial increase in the use of remedial reading centers in schools, but much more needs to be done. A variety of corrective materials are available and more are likely to be developed with continuing research. Nonetheless, despite this increase in resources, the school's success record is far from spectacular. Cultivation of childrens' desire and self-confidence remains the dominant goal.

Once these two essentials are assured, teacher quality makes the greatest difference. Continuing efforts to extend the competence of reading teachers will probably yield the best results.

In conclusion, a few simple interrelationships can be drawn among demands for a return to educational basics, renewed interest in teacher in-service education, and the Right to Read purpose. So long as scores on standardized reading tests remain below par, schools are almost certain to solicit teacher in-service programs that focus upon improved methods of reading instruction.

Is there really an emergency with respect to the teaching of fundamentals? As schools respond to public expectation and stress the basics, scores on standardized tests almost certainly will rise. Other important objectives may suffer, but a realignment in emphasis is inevitable. Until standardized test scores do go up, people are likely to act as if there is an emergency and a considerable amount of research and development will be dedicated to the improvement of reading, writing and arithmetic. State departments of education are likely to be called upon to plan and implement a variety of teacher professional growth activities directed towards the improved teaching of educational fundamentals. Good things are likely to occur--albeit for the wrong reasons.